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**MARIAN KOŁODZIEJ'S 'MEMORY FILES.
LABYRINTHS' AT THE ST MAXIMILIAN CENTRE IN HARMĘŻE
AND ANONYMOUS SKETCHES STORED IN THE RESOURCES
OF THE GROSS-ROSEN MUSEUM AS DOCUMENTS
OF THE TIME OF THE HOLOCAUST**

Abstract

In the lower floor of the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate in Harmęże, which is part of the St Maximilian Centre, an exhibition has been installed entitled „Klisze pamięci. Labirynty” (Memory Files. Labyrinths). The exhibition features drawings by Marian Kołodziej, a former Auschwitz prisoner. The Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum contain a collection of sketches by an anonymous author, most likely a prisoner of the concentration camp, so far unpublished in their original form with back matter. The authors of this article jointly present the individual drawing compositions of M. Kołodziej and anonymous drawings preserved in the archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum. Their value as testimonials has been emphasised, while highlighting the undeniable artistic value of the illustrations. Both „Klisze pamięci. Labirynty” and the analysed drawings from Gross-Rosen, which Henryk Motowilczuk donated in 2007 to the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica (ref. 11022/DP), have documentary value and enrich the study on World War II. Seven situational compositions, drawn in pairs of two, four, and a single one on three sheets of wrapping paper, as well as an exposition of drawings by M. Kołodziej,

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a prisoner marked with the number 432, formed the source basis of the article, which uses the case study method. The text is an attempt at a synthetic presentation of testimony from the perspective of an art historian and literary scholar: a composition of drawings created after almost fifty years of silence on the subject of M. Kołodziej's experiences in a concentration camp, and a document of camp life found behind a picture frame almost sixty years after the liberation of the camp, seen from an individual perspective. The paper addresses the issue of the analogy of drawing to reality, and also touches on the essence of each sketch individually and outlines the strategies undertaken by the draughtsman.

Keywords: Marian Kołodziej's „Klische pamięci. Labirynty”; St Maximilian Centre in Harmże; anonymous sketches; Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica; artistic activity of the camp prisoners

It is not an exhibition – not art, not pictures, but words enclosed in a drawing [...]. Art is helpless in the face of what man has wrought on man... A look at Auschwitz through drawing. Anyone who has been in Auschwitz and survived Auschwitz has been marked with the inalienable lifelong stigma of the human tragedy that unfolded there. I would like to hint to the viewer: be patient, patiently read everything that is written in these drawings. These are my 'drawn words' addressed to you. You need to read them.²

The Polish historiography on the artistic activities of concentration camp prisoners has so far devoted too little space to the surviving manifestations of painting or visual arts talents as gestures establishing a special tripartite relationship between the creator, the reality and the viewer.³ The peculiarities of concentration camps, the conditions and rules applying in each of them shaped the illegal or legal artistic activity of the imprisoned, which oftentimes, in addition to their deep faith and desire to survive, constituted for them solid defence mechanisms against total enslavement. In a world of violence, the artistic creations of the camps' inmates were the most beautiful expression of human discontent with the overwhelming evil. As Anna Pawełczyńska notes: 'Every norm that constitutes a cultural achievement was dysfunctional under concentration camp conditions. Each of the Ten Commandments required a thorough reinterpretation.'⁴ This is why concentration camp inmates cried to the rescue with art that sublimates the wartime experience.

² The quote is the words of Marian Kołodziej, which were made the motto in the publication: T. Świebocka, *Słowo wstępne*, in: H. Słojewska-Kołodziej, *Twoja droga przez Labirynty Mariana Kołodzieja. Przewodnik*, Gdańsk-Harmże 2018, p. 4.

³ The attestation placed in an artistic or literary context is not a genre or form, but a gesture (undertaken in the face of and in the wake of experience – the experience of reality at a particular historical moment – directed to someone who may become the recipient and guarantor). The gesture stems from need, necessity or compulsion and can be unintentional or deliberate. Cf. G. Hartman, *Ciemność widoma*, „Literatura na Świecie”, 9–10 (2005), pp. 265–295.

⁴ A. Pawełczyńska, *Wartości a przemoc. Zarys socjologicznej problematyki Oświęcimia*, Warszawa 1973, p. 168.

Prisoners of concentration camps produced a variety of works done in secret and in hiding from the SS, showing the truth about life behind barbed wire. These were drawings bearing 'the mark of the artist's handwriting and the characteristics of the period in which the work was created,'⁵ and small both secular and religious objects made for the private use of the imprisoned, for example, crosses, rosaries, embroidered handkerchiefs, carved figures of the Child, angels and animals. They reflected the need for emotional, spiritual and aesthetic experiences even in the harsh conditions of the camp. The captives also produced works by inmate artists (such as birthday or Christmas cards with calligraphed phrases and titles of Christmas carols, like „Stille Nacht”) for the camp service.

In the case of Marian Kołodziej,⁶ an Auschwitz prisoner with camp number 432, the return to his experiences – and thus the creation of a harrowing visual history – came after a silence of almost fifty years. The spur to tell the story of himself and the non-survivors of the 'death factory' was his illness – a stroke and the accompanying paralysis. In order to facilitate his rehabilitation, he began drawing scenes of camp life in pencil. This simultaneous self-therapy began in 1993 and ended in May 2009, a few months before his death. M. Kołodziej has created more than 260 drawing compositions of various sizes, using the simplest artistic means to express a frightening, yet unusual story. Using symbolism in the narrative, he evocatively depicted two worlds clashing with each other: good – in human figures (e.g., the prisoner hangs on wires, beaten with sticks like St Sebastian with arrows; St Francis, as a symbol of good, holds the slumping Fr Maximilian) and evil – in beasts (a round-shaped and human-destroying chimera; a fornicator –

⁵ T. Csorba, *O rysowaniu*, Warsaw 1980, p. 7.

⁶ Marian Kołodziej was born in 1921 in Raszków, and on 14 May 1940 he was arrested by the Gestapo in Kraków and imprisoned in Montelupich Prison, and later transferred to a prison in Tamów. On 14 June 1940, he arrived in the first transport to Auschwitz (he received camp number 432). While in the camp he was assigned to various kommandos: Abbruchkommando, Kiesgrubekommando, Strassenkommando, IIndustriehof – II Bauhof, Waserkommando. The sickly man was taken to the Blechhammer sub-camp in Świętochłowice, where he secretly copied plans of armaments factories for the resistance. For this activity he was sentenced to death and deported to Auschwitz, where he was imprisoned in the bunker of Block 11. He survived in the camp until the end of 1944, during the evacuation he was transferred to Gross-Rosen and then to Buchenwald. In February 1945, he was deported to Mauthausen. Liberation took place on 6 May 1945. After returning to Poland, he took up studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, at the Faculty of Painting, under the auspices of Prof. K. Frycz. He graduated in 1950 with a specialization in stage design. He left for Gdańsk, where he took a job at the Wybrzeże Theatre as stage designer. He was the creator of the papal altars in Zaspia in Gdańsk in 1987 and in Sopot in 1999. In 1997, he became an Honorary Citizen of the City of Gdańsk. In 1992, he suffered a stroke and was partially paralysed. On 6 February 2006, he was awarded the Gloria Artis Gold Medal for Merit to Culture. He died on 13 October 2009, at the age of 88, in a hospital in Gdańsk. On 23 October 2009, he was buried in the basement of the Franciscan church in Harmęże.

The Kraków Province of the Franciscans of St Anthony of Padua and Blessed Jakub Strzemię, expressing its appreciation and respect for Marian Kołodziej, admitted him to the circle of honorary brothers and friends of its Franciscan community in 1998. In 2003, he was awarded the statue of St Francis of Assisi.

a camp louse grows to the size of the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse bringing death; a monster – a triple-faced oberkapo resembling Svetovit – strikes the bell). The time of the war and the camps was shown in black and white (not counting the grey). He depicted the day of liberation from the camp, his dreams and memories in full colour (for example, when documenting the time and place of regaining freedom – May 1945 in Mauthausen-Ebensee – he used school paints he found and, due to the lack of a paintbrush, captured a fairy-tale alpine landscape with a match made from them). It is worth paying some attention at this point to the symbolism of the colours used. It is widely recognized that the symbolic value of colours is a type of information, a carrier of content and a manifestation of individual expression. In light of association theory, however, the symbolic meaning of colour may arise not necessarily as an intentional act by the artist, but as a result of the association of two independent qualities perceived by different senses, the result of which is a consistent message.⁷ Regardless of the adopted theory⁸ explaining the use of certain colours in M. Kołodziej's sketches, their meaning established in the culture is reduced to the association of the grey colour with poverty, misery, passivity, and the black colour with death, despair, mourning, resignation, and evil.⁹ These very colours dominate the artist's camp-related works. The importance of the full range of colours in liberation artworks needs no comment.

M. Kołodziej's drawings are a specific conversation with Memling and his depiction of the philosophy of the Last Judgement – with the condemned and the saved. It is also an undermining of his faith in the fair judgement of life.

On 14 August 1998, the St Maximilian Centre in Harmęże¹⁰ saw the opening of the permanent exhibition titled „Memory Files. Labyrinths,”¹¹ which, with the truly scenographic precision of a deeply thought-out, macabre spectacle created by Hitlerism, consists of countless drawings and paintings, assembled in strings of cardboard, combining into large boards, into a spatial, labyrinthine display.¹² Tracing the camp experience of the author's camp and all those who went through the hell of camp imprisonment, we are confronted with visuals depicting death devices that were thoughtfully and devilishly constructed (Kołodziej chalks up

⁷ Cf. S. Popek, *Barwy i psychika*, Lublin 2021, p. 81.

⁸ The problem of perception and use of colours was addressed by many painters (e.g. E. Delacroix, Ph. O. Runge), physicists (H. von Helmholtz, I. Newton) and even philosophers (L. Wittgenstein – the theory of colour exclusion).

⁹ Cf. S. Popek, *Barwy i psychika*, p. 78.

¹⁰ The St Maximilian Center in Harmęże, which began its establishment in 1989, consists of three buildings: the Church of Our Lady Immaculate, the Franciscan convent of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary with a retreat house, and a retreat and educational house named after St Maximilian, run by the Missionaries of the Immaculate of Father Kolbe. *Centrum św. Maksymiliana w Harmężach*, <https://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl/> (accessed on: 22.04.2021).

¹¹ „*Klische pamięci. Labirynty*” Mariana Kołodziej, <https://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl/> (accessed on: 10.04.2021).

¹² The monumental exhibition „Memory Files. Labyrinths” was reviewed by Sebastian Świadek, who, in tribute to Marian Kołodziej, attempted to discuss his dramatic camp experiences and convey the message that humanity has not learned anything from history. S. Świadek, *Klische pamięci numeru 432. Mariana Kołodzieja zapis gehenny obozowej*, Kraków 2011.

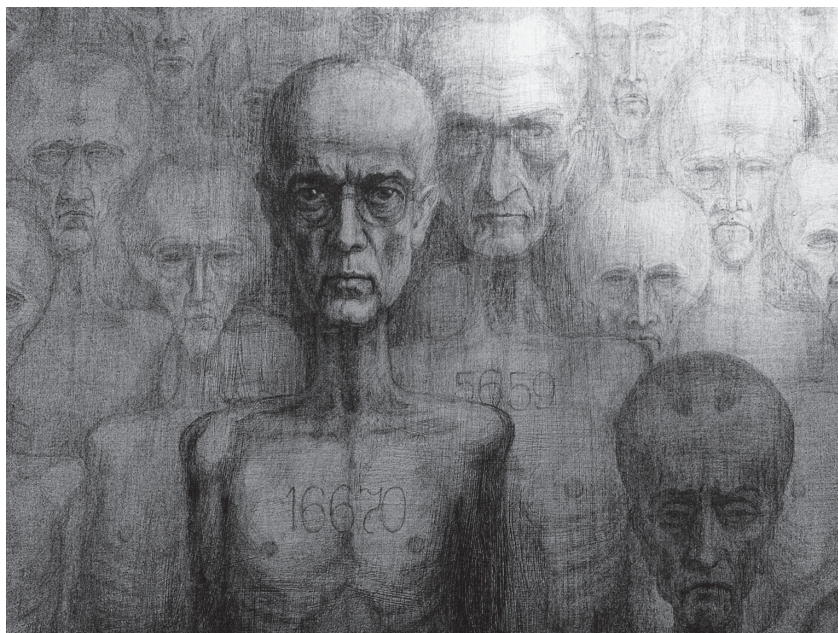


Fig. 1. Father Maximilian M. Kolbe against the background of the silhouettes of fellow prisoners. Copyright © St Maximilian Kolbe Centre in Harmęże



Fig. 2. Prisoner Marian Kołodziej – camp number 432. Copyright © St Maximilian Kolbe Centre in Harmęże

the crematorium grate, the pillar as one of the most horrific tortures, making an attempt to allude to Christ suffering in the crown of thorns – in this image, Christ removes prisoner No 432 from the martyr's pillar).

The installation of the exhibition in the lower floor of the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate in Harmęże was of considerable importance to the creator, since, as he stated in an interview, 'I stood at one roll call with Father Kolbe.'¹³ Saint Maximilian – camp number 16670, next to Marian Kołodziej – camp number 432, became the second hero of the exhibition. The author of the „Memory Files” never concealed the fact that the gesture of St Maximilian's selfless love towards an unknown husband and father of a family during a roll call in July 1941 made such a great impression on him that he began to seek a second Christ in Fr Kolbe.



Fig. 3. The symbolic gesture of breaking the wafer.
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Rev. Prof. Józef Tischner addressed the exposition, which depicts what the rejection of the Decalogue and Christian values in life can lead to, as follows: 'First of all, it seems that any transformation of these images into words is some kind of detriment to them. The images are so full of eloquence that any attempt to supplement them with verbal commentary is a hopeless endeavour. They not only require no such commentary, but in some sense they invalidate it. Of course, the whole philosophy of Auschwitz can be developed against their background, but even so, the number of words spoken will not pass for the quality of these

¹³ H. Słojewska-Kołodziej, *Twoja droga przez labirynty Mariana Kołodzieja*, p. 42.

images. These images have the quality that is one of a kind. It seems to me that they are first of all paintings about Man. And I would say: A man in a state of spiritual decay. Not only physical one. These are paintings about death, which has lost all meaning.¹⁴

The statement that the goal of artists is not to present only cruelty¹⁵ seems fundamental in the context of the quoted excerpt from Rev. Prof. J. Tischner's opinion on the paintings of M. Kołodziej and this text. The creators do not try to present anything to the viewer, but only work through certain states and issues, tapping into the affective potential of subconscious messages. The same is true of the artistic testimonies of concentration camp prisoners – those created in and out of the camp, from a great distance in time.

It should be noted that the first manifestation of their inner need to express themselves and their feelings were drawings on postal blanks, cards and forms¹⁶ of official letters¹⁷ sent from concentration camps. Camp censors sometimes allowed prisoners to decorate official correspondence with drawings.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the content of the sketches was diverse – from floral motifs¹⁹ through images

¹⁴ H. Słojewska-Kołodziej, *Twoja droga przez labirynty Mariana Kołodzieja*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Cf. A. Kisiel, *Przelamując spojrzenie Orfeusza. Praca (anty)archiwalna Brachy L. Ettinger, „Er(r)go”*, 41 (2020) issue 2, pp. 97–110.

¹⁶ 'Letters sent from the camp were subjected to censorship by the Postzensurstelle, which was staffed by SS officers. Camp regulations mandated that letters be written in German on a special letter form. On one A4 page, a prisoner could write two columns of fifteen lines each. Regardless of the current state of health, it was mandatory to include the phrase: "I'm healthy and I feel good." When a prisoner tried to pass on some inappropriate or unauthorized information, the SS censors would delete it. Often, too, the letter was not sent at all, and the author was, of course, additionally punished.' J. Klistala, *Żołnierze rybnickiego ZWZ/AK, POP, PTOP w obozach koncentracyjnych: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Mauthausen, Gusen, Dachau, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, Majdanek, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg... i innych*, Bielsko-Biała 2008, pp. 127–128.

¹⁷ M. Kołodziej depicted the scene of writing letters to families in his drawings, allowing some colour to leak into this image. It seems as if the recipients of the letters are still stuck in the memory of the imprisoned. Every prisoner wants to separate from others when writing a letter, to be alone focused on the words sent to the loved ones.

¹⁸ The website of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica presents Christmas camp letters with drawings. 'A deviation from the rules of correspondence that was tolerated by the camp authorities was to decorate letters with drawings. The drawings often expressed a longing for freedom and family and allowed them to survive. They depicted memorable sights, flowers, fairy tale characters and holiday themes, among others. [...] The materials for making them, i.e. crayons, paints, pencils, were supplied illegally from the "Baubüro" construction kommando. The SS were also interested in this work. Particularly popular among them were paintings – oil and watercolour, business cards, birthday invitations, etc.' *Bożonarodzeniowe listy obozowe*, <https://www.gross-rosen.eu/bożonarodzeniowe-listy-obozowe/> (accessed on: 15.12.2017). Cf. L. Sadzikowska, *Listy z łagrów i więzień 1939–1945. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Katowice 2019, p. 87.

¹⁹ Franciszek Ogon (born 10 September 1907 in Rybnik; camp number in Auschwitz 107466; died 17 June 1945 in Gusen due to extreme exhaustion) officially wrote letters in German and one – the last one – in Polish. On the form of a letter to his wife Maria, dated 30 July 1944, he painted a bouquet of flowers in the upper left corner. In this way, he expressed the memory of her name day. Cf. L. Sadzikowska, *Listy z łagrów*, p. 258. Colourful pictures depicting a bouquet of flowers were

of knights in armour²⁰ to Christmas motifs (images of angels, carrying a heart in their hands, and the inscription *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, hovering over a Christmas tree). These drawings should be considered a considerable source of learning the truth about those times,²¹ keeping in mind that ‘it is important to reach the original material correlates of writing practices’.²² Due to its enormous historical and emotional value, camp art is exceptionally valuable; it is a universal message understandable to any audience.

Art works born under conditions of extreme danger are a remarkable and moving document of time and history. One can also find in them feelings and emotions that are difficult to reproduce nowadays, which accompanied the ‘artists in striped uniforms’ every day.

The source materials²³ from the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica (recorded under ref. 11022/DP) and complementary copies of 20 sketches, donated by the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, sketched by Imre Holló, Ph.D.,²⁴ a prisoner of the Riese Dörnhau²⁵ camp in the Owl Mountains, may become interesting didascalia to M. Kołodziej’s sketches.

also created on the blanks of camp letters sent from Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp. Cf. e.g., the letters stored in the Gross-Rosen Museum Archives, ref. 1609/DP-L, 1636/DP-L, 2153/DP-L.

²⁰ Cf. S. Kłodziński, *Merytoryczne i psychologiczne znaczenie oświęcimskich listów obozowych*, „Przegląd Lekarski”, 47 (1990) issue 1, p. 35.

²¹ Cf. J. Jaworska, *Nie wszystkim umrę. Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939–1945*, Warsaw 1975.

²² P. Rodak, *Rzeczy pisane, rzeczy napisane. O materialności praktyk piśmiennych*, in: *Literatura i „faktury” historii XX (i XXI) wieku*, eds. A. Molisak, J. Wierzejska, T. Wójcik, A. Zieniewicz, Warsaw 2014, p. 45.

²³ The material was collected as part of the implementation of the Miniatura 2 grant, awarded by the National Science Centre for the project ‘The Role of Reading in Selected Concentration Camps – Collection of Source Materials’, ref. 2018/02/X/HS2/01015. The search was conducted in the second half of 2019. For their kind help, words of thanks are due to Leokadia Lewandowska and Aneta Małek from the Collection Department of the Gross-Rosen Museum.

²⁴ Imre Holló – one of the Hungarian prisoners of AL Riese Dörnhau, a branch of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. He was transferred to the Owl Mountains region directly from Auschwitz, probably on 6 June 1944. The camp of his imprisonment was located in the buildings of a carpet factory in the small village of Dörnhau, better known today as Kolce near Głuszyca. On the site of the former plant, Imre found pieces of cardboard on which he began sketching drawings depicting camp life: the prisoners’ work, morning roll calls, the serving of meals. He also did not shy away from drastic scenes, such as the abuse of prisoners by camp guards, emaciated ‘living skeletons’ and executions. He did his work secretly, during meal breaks, often with the help of fellow inmates. *Archiwum Historii Mówionej Ziemi Walbrzyskiej*, <https://www.archiwum-historii-mowionej.pl/grafiki-imre-hollo-dokumentujace-zaglade-w-sztolniach-walimskich/> (accessed on: 13.11.2020).

²⁵ ‘Among the numerous sub-camps, their complex located in the region of the Owl Mountains had a special character, with large-scale work undertaken on the construction of a complex of quarters for Hitler and the chief civil and military authorities of the Third Reich. Several thousand Jewish prisoners were sent to this work, which was deployed in at least 12 camps, collectively known as Arbeitslager Riese, and headed by SS hauptsturmführer Albert Lütkemeyer. They worked under particularly difficult conditions to excavate adits, unload construction materials, and build the necessary infrastructure. [...] The group of camps forming AL Riese consisted of: AL Dörnhau in Kolce,

Documents nos. 1–3 were previously published in their original form, without back matter, in the pages of the local newspaper²⁶ and in the *Odkrywca* magazine.²⁷ It is worth taking action to ensure that the materials found and donated to the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum by Henryk Motowilczuk, an amateur painter living in Walim, reach a wide audience, to remind and warn against totalitarianism. The authors of the present study understand the analysed sketches, according to Roland Barthes²⁸ lesson, as an image – a representation, a drawing on paper, and as a representation (resurrection) of iconographic tropes and historical contexts.

The drawings by the anonymous author, found²⁹ more than sixty years after the liberation of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp, reflect the organization of the murder process – it took place in isolation, away from the eyes of witnesses. The idea was to keep the crime secret, but also to dehumanize the victims.

One may wonder why, in this case, the author, most likely a prisoner with a piece of paper at his disposal, chose the technique of drawing as a way of expressing the camp experience. Psychologists find that making a drawing is an easier way to communicate with others than verbally confessing personal feelings, especially if they cause anxiety. They also point out that ‘the unreliability of human memory does not apply to drawing’.³⁰ The display of M. Kołodziej’s works seems to confirm the findings of psychologists.

There is no doubt that the technique of writing, which requires absolute skill and certainty in the arrangement of signs-letters, which are supposed to signify a particular designator or symbol, to convey a specific meaning, was not an immanent and, so to speak, primary and innate form of expression of the author of the drawings. The creator of the analysed sketches chose a drawing technique that requires careful search and full concentration of shape alignment to represent the viewed or remembered reality on the plane of paper. Perhaps subconsciously, the prisoner of the camp communicates to the viewer through his drawings the message that words do not have as much range of expression as the drawn line, they are too insignificant in meaning to express or articulate the truth that one needs to present, to visualize. In this sense, words are useless, because none can convey the tragedy experienced in the camp. Writing can be seen as an act that from the beginning

Erlenbusch in Olszyniec, Falkenberg in Sokolec, Fürstenstein in Książ, Kaltwasser in Zimna, Lärche, Märzbachtal and Säuferswasser in the Głuszyca area, Schotterwerk in Głuszyca Górna, Tannhausen in Jedlina, where the central district of the complex was also set up, AL Wolfsberg on Mount Włodarz and Wüstegiersdorf in Głuszyca’. A. Konieczny, *KL Gross-Rosen hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny na Dolnym Śląsku 1940–1945*, Wałbrzych 2012, p. 33.

²⁶ A. Szałkowski, *Tragedia na kartkach papieru*, „Panorama Wałbrzyska” of 7 August 2007, pp. 1, 3. <https://walbrzych.naszemiasto.pl/tragedia-na-kartkach-papieru/ar/c1-6709165> (accessed on: 1.12.2020).

²⁷ P. Maszkowski, *Szkice zagłady*, „Odkrywca”, 5 (2007) pp. 9–12.

²⁸ R. Barthes, *Retoryka obrazu*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, 75 (1985) issue 3, p. 289.

²⁹ In 2007 Henryk Motowilczuk, who had purchased old picture frames from residents of nearby towns a few years earlier, came across three folded yellowed sheets of paper while refreshing the frame in which a damaged picture depicting a bouquet of flowers was placed. Cf. A. Szałkowski, *Tragedia na kartkach papieru*.

³⁰ G.D. Oster, P. Gould, *Rysunek w psychoterapii*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 23.

should be precise, clear, but thus limited by the content of the text. A drawing is developed gradually, rarely finished, leaving flexibility of interpretation and liberty to read its lines. It is also individual, unique; a pattern, an outline, an act-signature of the author's existence is retained in the line and point within the gesture of the hand moving while drawing. The word, although more capacious in meaning, is becoming a tool of expression that is commonplace and thus less personal and intimate. The author of the analysed sketches, as a witness³¹ transcending the state of oscillation between the 'impossibility' and the 'imperative' of narrating,³² has created a message about the camp experience, using memory and means of expression carried by the affects he felt. The crime scene depicted in the drawings is corroborated by the rich material contained in the trial hearings, the testimony of Aniela Ptak³³ or the studies of experts on the subject.³⁴ One needs to remember that '[...] a witness can become not only a survivor, but also an observer of an event that has rubbed shoulders with violence, participated in the event in some way, if only by mere presence, also someone who was not present but has knowledge of the event, feels its impact and the need to convey those impressions.'³⁵

The recovered drawings, drawn on three pieces of paper, undoubtedly of great documentary value, do not seem to represent a high artistic level on the surface. However, this is only an initial, rather misleading recognition. These works can be classified as sketches rather than finished works, but this was probably the result of deliberate decision inspired by their subject matter. If they were made in the camp, revealing them carried terrible consequences.³⁶ Haste and sketchiness were therefore a necessity. The most common group of camp paintings – in addition to those officially done by prisoners, often professional artists, commissioned by the authorities – were portraits of fellow inmates.³⁷ The most forbidden subjects,

³¹ A witness understood as someone who testifies 'to the extent that their testimony always presupposes something (a fact, thing or word) that precedes them'. G. Agamben, *Co zostaje z Auschwitz. Archiwum i świadek. Homo sacer III*, Warsaw 2008, p. 151.

³² Cf. D. Laub, *Zdarzenie bez świadka: prawda, świadectwo oraz ocalenie*, „Teksty Drugie”, 5 (2007) pp. 120–123.

³³ During the war, Aniela Ptak lived and worked as a forced labourer in a linen factory in the Walim area. As testified by her, she witnessed many of the crimes committed by the Nazis against prisoners working in the same factory or in the tunnelling of adits. Aniela Ptak's testimony from that period is archived at the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica.

³⁴ Cf. M. Mołdawa, *Gross-Rosen – obóz koncentracyjny na Śląsku*, Warsaw 1979; D. Sula, *Życie kulturalne i religijne więźniów w KL Gross-Rosen*, Wałbrzych 2007; P. Kruszyński, *Podziemia w Górach Sowich i Zamku Książ*, Wałbrzych 2004; R. Owczarek, *U bram „Riese”*, Kraków 2013.

³⁵ A. Dauksza, *Ustanawianie świadka*, in: *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest?*, eds. A. Dauksza, K. Koprońska, Warsaw 2019, p. 172.

³⁶ It should be added that 'The whole organization of life in the camp was methodically aimed at abusing and breaking the prisoner physically and mentally.' Z. Łukaszkiewicz, *Gross-Rosen*, „Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce”, 8 (1956) pp. 80–91.

³⁷ Cf. http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/pl_18_sztuka/ (accessed on: 5.12.2020). One of the first drawn portraits in the collections of the Gross-Rosen Museum is a self-portrait of prisoner Franciszek Jązwiecki (camp number 9212). He was sent to KL Gross-Rosen on 13 March 1943, and was transferred to KL Gross-Rosen the same year. The sketchbook he saved includes portraits of prisoners at

punishable which the greatest repression, were genre scenes depicting life in the camp. The work was done clandestinely, using captured materials, and scrupulously concealed. These are the most likely circumstances under which the sketches discussed here were created.

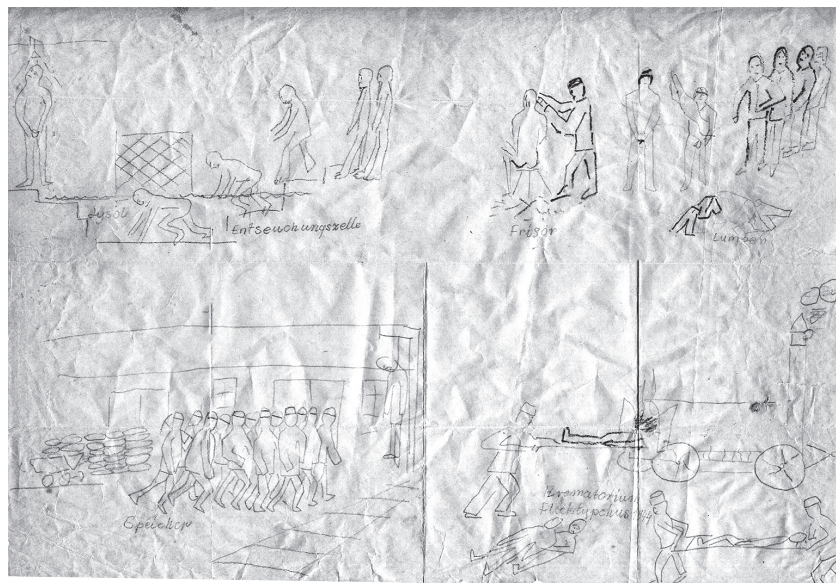


Fig. 4. Scenes from camp life (bathhouse, disinfection, haircuts, changing clothes, prisoners marching out to work, crematorium). From the resources of the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica, ref. 11022/DP

The sketches were made on scraps of wrapping paper (one groundwork is quite crumpled, another is torn), which is a clear indication that it was a decorative material. They are drawn up in pencil and black crayon (here and there the pencil is corrected with crayon, as if the author had both tools at their disposal), in a hurry, being more of a conceptual sketch than a finished work. This was probably due to the need to make a quick, cartoonish note of the remembered situation. A total of seven situational compositions were made, spread over two, four and one on three sheets of wrapping paper. The placement of several scenes on a single scrap of paper suggests that the author had no more of it available. The sequential nature of the scenes recorded in the sketches allows us to assume that the artist wanted to show the succession of camp events, the tragic finale of which was the crematorium. Some of them are described in German. Seemingly the author's intention was to abbreviate not so much the story of what life was

Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen and only one self-portrait mentioned, taken at Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Cf. D. Sula, *Życie kulturalne i religijne więźniów*, p. 29. It is interesting to note that the only surviving portrait of a female prisoner is a drawing depicting a Hungarian Jewish woman who was imprisoned in the Zittau sub-camp (the picture is small: 4 x 4.5 cm). Cf. Archiwum Muzeum Gross-Rosen, ref. 825/F.

like in the camp, but how it proceeded on and how it inevitably ended. There is no room for individual expression, which we usually encounter in a finished work such as M. Kołodziej's paintings.

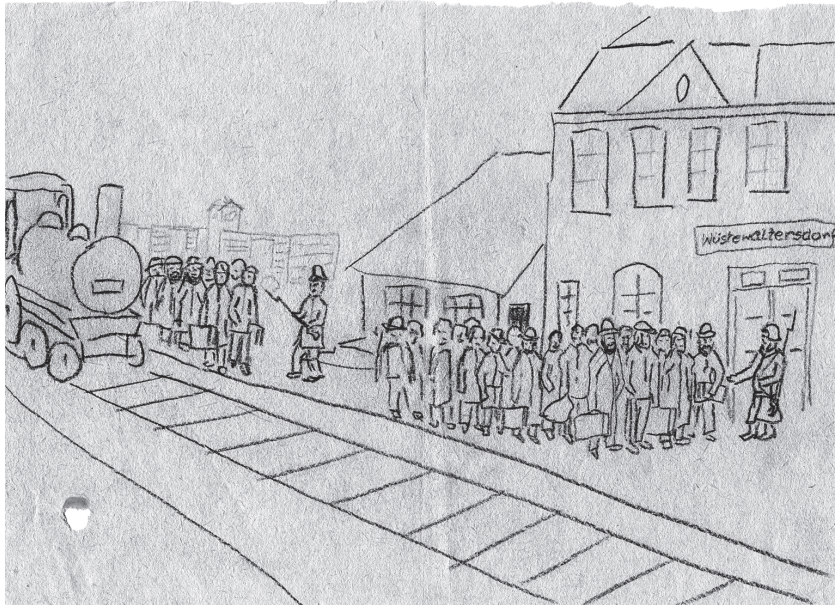


Fig. 5. Unloading of prisoners arriving at the camp. From the resources of the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica, ref. 11022/DP

After a close examination of the compositional arrangements of all the drawings, the conclusion emerges that, despite the nature of an abbreviated note, they are well thought out. They convey in a condensed way the most essential elements of the unfolding events and thus characterize them well. All episodes are very lush in terms of narrative, but no less valuable in terms of drawing, although at first glance they do not appear as such. They are characterized by well-executed foreshortenings, i.e. the ability to convey the essence of the objects and places depicted (locomotive, station buildings, prisoners' cells). The movement of the characters was also aptly characterized. It is dynamic at moments when inmates perform some activity (disinfection, going to work). Static elements, on the other hand, draws attention in depictions of crowded people waiting for transport in front of the Wüstewaltersdorf (Walim) station, and the SS officers guarding them. Despite the sketchy nature of the whole, the anonymous author captures the physiognomic features of the characters. Here we have men of varying height, some with facial hair, with clearly Semitic features,³⁸ wearing hats and caps, judging by their attire – representing different material status, and probably (which is known

³⁸ Cf. A. Kobilec, *Więźniowie Żydzi w KL Gross-Rosen i jego obozach filialnych*, in: *Narody Europy w KL Gross-Rosen*, ed. A. Konieczny, Wałbrzych 1995, pp. 34–35.

to us) different citizenship. This attention to detail while keeping the message brief was most likely dictated by a desire to convey situational truth, to show a scene that probably sank deeply into the author's memory. The background of the composition is the very well-drawn architecture of the Wüstewaltersdorf train station. If we compare the representation of this building from the camp drawing with its view in old photographs, we become struck by the fidelity of the detail.³⁹ The station has a distinctive mansard roof with a gable, as well as a sign with the word 'Wüstewaltersdorf' above the entrance. The number of windows, the proportions of the annex relative to the main edifice and many other elements of the building are consistent with the real objects. This remarkable fidelity of detail raises the assumption that the drawing was made on the spot. This would be unlikely to happen if the author was one of those awaiting transport. Did the author have an extraordinary memory for details, or did they make a sketch already in the post-camp period, adding to the faithfully reconstructed topography, a memorized image with people waiting for transport? Or maybe they witnessed transportation with the station in the background every day, so they could easily recreate it. Similar questions can be asked about the brilliantly presented locomotive. The excellent scheme of this means of transportation shown here takes into account all the most essential features of the machine's construction and is rendered correctly in perspective brief.

The drawing depicting transportation, drawn on a separate groundwork, is undoubtedly the best in terms of artistic skill, but also the most puzzling. It raises the question: who was its author? Did they work nearby as a prisoner and were they really an amateur artist? They certainly had firm hand in drawing lines. Straight lines are drawn flawlessly, unlike amateur work. Awareness of perspective drawing further demonstrates the artist's strong drawing skills. Also notable is the ability to synthesize relevant content and narrative talent. The sketchy nature of these works may be due to the circumstances of their creation – working in secret, under pressure, but the aforementioned apt sketchiness of the drawings betrays the hand of a talented person, although it is difficult to say whether they were professionally engaged in art.

At this point, it is worth returning to the *Memory Files*, since an interesting common element in the works of M. Kołodziej and the anonymous artist is transportation, and especially the train, the means of transport that brought prisoners to the camps. While viewing the exhibition *Memory Files. Labyrinths* by M. Kołodziej, visitors must first walk through a stylized semi-dark cattle wagon, thus taking in the atmosphere of the war years and understanding this dark time in human history.

The realism of the Wüstewaltersdorf station and the locomotive conveyed in the drawings of the anonymous prisoner, confirming the deep emotions of the transport participant, prompts another question. Where and when were the drawings created, given their unusual storage location? There are many indications that

³⁹ The Polish Poland website (<http://polishpoland.com/tag/wustewaltersdorf/>, accessed on: 5.12.2020) features a postcard with a view of the station, which looks exactly like the one depicted in the camp sketch.

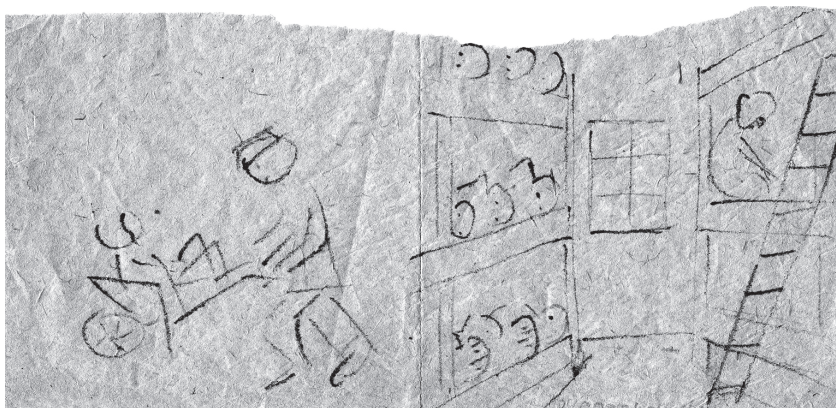


Fig. 6. Inside the barracks. From the resources of the Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica, ref. 11022/DP

two of them were created in the camp,⁴⁰ which is supported by the notational type of narration and random groundwork. Some doubt may be raised by the drawing depicting transportation – slightly different in character, drawn on a separate sheet and well-composed. Its extraordinary detail and the fact that it is made entirely in crayon may raise the question of whether it was made during imprisonment or in the post-camp period. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum website reads:

A separate group consists of post-war works. Artists who survived the camp tried to convey on canvas or paper the enormity of the tragedy and the horrifying realities of camp life. They created works, and sometimes whole cycles where we can see the conditions of existence of prisoners, roll calls, tragic sanitary conditions, hunger, punishment, humiliation, as well as emotions: fear, despair and helplessness.⁴¹

If the drawing depicting the transport was made in a camp, its author either had an extraordinary eidetic memory, combined with drawing skills, or made the sketch *in situ*, observing the transportation. If they drew it up after the war, as a supplement to quick camp sketches, they may have seen the station in nature or recreated it from a postcard. However, this is unlikely, given the similarity of the groundwork to the other two sketches.

Another ambiguity that arises here concerns corrections with black crayon on the pencil sketch. Were they applied later, or for some reason the unknown author corrected the invisible sketch in crayon? We know from prisoners' testimonies, collected in the archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, that the materials used to make the illegal drawings were obtained by the imprisoned, and

⁴⁰ It is worth noting that the manifestation of artistic, cultural activities was a defence mechanism against the loss of subjectivity or more broadly: humanity. Cf. S. Ruszkowska, *Co powiedziałby Goethe, czyli o kulturze w Buchenwaldzie*, „Teksty Drugie”, 6 (2016) pp. 406–416.

⁴¹ *Sztuka w KL Auschwitz*, http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/pl_18_sztuka/ (accessed on: 5.12.2020).

there was severe punishment for their possession. Perhaps the corrections are due to the difficulties the author encountered in obtaining tools for their work – they corrected some parts of their sketches with a crayon they acquired later.

It is worth comparing these camp drawings with other similar ones documenting the daily reality of the place. The works of M. Kołodziej and those collected in the archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum can serve as comparative material. Particularly relevant here is a sketchbook by an anonymous artist with the initials MM, known as *Szkieownik z Auschwitz* (Sketchbook from Auschwitz).⁴² As in the drawings discussed above, it depicts the extermination of prisoners and similarly captures the topography of the site with remarkable detail. The author of the *Sketchbook from Auschwitz* also uses a simplified drawing form, and captures perspective and situational details just as well.

The *Sketchbook from Auschwitz* is a unique document, but no less valuable are the three, or rather seven sketches from Gross-Rosen, which, although much more modest, also document the time of the Holocaust. To fully assess the value of these drawings, it is necessary to deepen the research efforts devoted to them. Undoubtedly, they require conservation expertise in terms of the groundwork and tool used, but also a historical archival search on the anonymous author. Their identity may be possible to establish.

Regardless of the outcome of this research, perhaps to be undertaken in the future, the sketches remain valuable documentary material, triggering strong emotions due to their asceticism.

Drawings created under extreme conditions or from a certain distance in time, as in the case of M. Kołodziej's paintings, are not only an important document of time and history, but also a means of expressing the strong feelings that accompanied the prisoners. They are also, and perhaps above all, evidence of what their author has seen or experienced. Such materials should be disseminated by publishing them as artistic testimonies of the past.

It seems that a careful look at the drawings presented in the article and watching the exhibition of M. Kołodziej's works at the St Maximilian Centre in Harmęże allows the viewer to discover the invisible, seemingly absent sense that lies in the detail of individual pictures. The ability of precise observation, as a unique kind of recording of camp reality, and, on the other hand, the perspective of the viewer who, decades after the drawings were made, is able to see not only things that are hard to see, but also things that are invisible and contemporarily unseen, is a kind of perceiving the world as a mystery, both in the material and metaphysical dimensions. It is noteworthy that the creation and discovery of the described images took place and is still taking place in silence. This immanent feature connects the creator-prisoner and the modern viewer with an imperceptible bond.

Viewing the anonymous drawings in the Gross-Rosen Museum Archives and the exhibition *Memory Files. Labyrinths* triggers at least two perspectives – an internal one, i.e. looking at the scene from the perspective of the characters immortalized

⁴² *Rysunki przedstawiające rzeczywistość obozową. Szkieownik z Auschwitz. Prace nieznanego autora*, http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/pl_18_sztuka/ (accessed on: 5.12.2020).

in the paintings, and an external one, i.e. observing that occurs outside the depicted world, outside the sketches. Both the permanent exhibition of M. Kołodziej's paintings and the drawings of the anonymous Gross-Rosen concentration camp prisoner are an opening to the space to the evocation of hidden meanings, to the senses that mostly appear on the margins of reality, and which, being the very essence of things, reach the ultimate truth.

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KLISZE PAMIĘCI. LABIRYNTY MARIANA KOŁODZIEJA W CENTRUM ŚW. MAKSYMILIANA W HARMEŻACH I ANONIMOWE SZKICE PRZECHOWYWANE W ZASOBACH MUZEUM GROSS-ROSEN JAKO DOKUMENTY CZASU ZAGŁADY

Abstrakt

W dolnej kondygnacji kościoła Matki Bożej Niepokalanej w Harmężach, wchodzącego w skład Centrum św. Maksymiliana, zainstalowana została ekspozycja zatytułowana *Klisze pamięci. Labirynty*. Jest to wystawa rysunków Mariana Kołodzieja, byłego więźnia KL Auschwitz. W Archiwum Muzeum Gross-Rosen przechowywany jest zbiór szkiców anonimowego twórcy, najprawdopodobniej więźnia obozu koncentracyjnego, dotychczas niepublikowany w oryginalnej formie z aparatem naukowym. Autorki artykułu zestawiają poszczególne kompozycje rysunkowe M. Kołodzieja oraz anonimowe rysunki zachowane w ar-

chiwum Muzeum Gross-Rosen. Uwypuklając niezaprzeczną wartość artystyczną rysunków, podkreślono ich wartość jako świadectwa. Zarówno *Klische pamięci. Labirynty*, jak i poddane analizie rysunki z Gross-Rosen, które Henryk Motowilczuk przekazał w 2007 roku Archiwum Muzeum Gross-Rosen w Rogoźnicy (sygn. 11022/DP), mają wartość dokumentu i wzbogacają studia drugojęzyczne. Podstawą artykułu, w którym zastosowano metodę *case study*, stało się siedem kompozycji sytuacyjnych, narysowanych po dwie, cztery i pojedyncza na trzech kartkach papieru pakunkowego, a także ekspozycja rysunków M. Kołodzieja, więźnia oznaczonego numerem 432. Tekst jest próbą syntetycznego przedstawienia z perspektywy historyka sztuki i literaturoznawcy świadectw – kompozycji rysunków stworzonej po bez mała pięćdziesięciu latach milczenia na temat przeżyć lagrowych M. Kołodzieja oraz dokumentu życia obozowego ujętego z perspektywy indywidualnej, odnalezionego za ramą obrazu po prawie sześćdziesięciu latach od wyzwolenia lagru. Artykuł porusza zagadnienie związane z kwestią analogiczności rysunku do rzeczywistości, a także dotyka istoty każdego szkicu z osobna i nakreśla podejmowane przez rysownika strategie.

Słowa kluczowe: Klisze pamięci. Labirynty; Marian Kołodziej; Centrum św. Maksymiliana w Harmężach; anonimowe szkice; Muzeum Gross-Rosen w Rogoźnicy; działalność artystyczna więźniów obozu